



Latson Road  
Interchange Coalition

*Partners in  
Building Relationships,  
Enhancing Mobility,  
Bridging Communities*

Thomas Sullivan  
Chairman

123 East Washington  
Howell, Michigan 48843

Phone: 517/546.3920  
Fax: 517/546.4115  
E-mail: latson@howell.org

March 28, 2005

To Members of the House and Senate Joint Transportation Committee:

Attached please find documentation concerning the efforts of this community to have a full interchange constructed on I-96 in the East Howell area.

Documents include:

- East Howell Access Study Time Line
- Three options to begin interchange construction
- Latson Road Interchange Case for Support
- Letter from Director Jeff
- Most recent newspaper coverage

The Latson Road Interchange Coalition appreciates the time you are spending in our community, addressing our concerns.

Sincerely,

Thomas P. Sullivan  
Chairman  
Latson Road Interchange Coalition

## East Howell Access Study Time Line

April 1989	County-sponsored interchange workshop in cooperation with Michigan Department of Transportation and Livingston County Planning Department. Focus on preserving capacity at interchanges with appropriate zoning and access management practices. Geometric deficiencies of existing interchanges discussed. MDOT encourages local officials to work with them to resolve problems of functional obsolescence.
March 1990	Brighton, Howell, Genoa, and Oceola leaders meet with LCRC officials regarding the deficiencies of the existing Lake Chemung interchange and the problems resulting from the partial ramps and the lack of a north-south corridor between Brighton and Howell that crossed I-96.
February 1991	LCRC officials and Livingston County Planning staff meet with personnel from the MDOT Bureau of Transportation Planning regarding a potential new interchange in the east Howell area that met the criteria of north-south route continuity and bi-directional access to I-96. Staff was informed that this would require a major planning study before it could be considered.
1992 to 1994	Continuing liaison with MDOT/BTP personnel and the office of Congressman Bob Carr. Rep. Carr's team is able to secure an earmark to fund a major investment study for the East Howell Area.
1995	The LCRC, MDOT, and SEMCOG agree on a request for proposal format for the selection of a consultant for the MIS. Ultimately, HNTB, Incorporated was selected by the evaluators and was hired in August.
1996 to 2000	Study team began the MIS with a unique community-based participation process. Ultimately this process received commendation from Federal Highway Administration for its unique blending of technical "expert" opinion and stakeholder involvement in the reviewing of the alternatives analysis and selection of the practical alternative.
October 3, 2000	The FHWA issues its Record of Decision approving the I-96 Interchange at East Howell. The decision included <u>both the replacement of the existing free flow west bound exit ramp and the construction of a full interchange at Latson Road.</u> All parties: local, state, and federal, recognized that the entire decision must be implemented together in order to achieve the objectives of the study.
May 2003	MDOT announces that it would utilize some congressionally-earmarked funds to construct a new and "safer" Lake Chemung interchange that was one part of the East Howell study. The project was completed in the fall of 2003.
December 2003	Latson Road Interchange Coalition is formed from members of the public safety community, employers, educators, citizen groups, and local elected officials to partner with MDOT to complete the work at the interchange.
November 2004	Congress appropriates an additional \$1 million for the project, creating an opportunity for the coalition and MDOT to develop additional investment strategies for the approximately \$3.2 million now available.

## Option 1—Build It Now

The reasons for building the balance of the East Howell Area Interchange now include:

- The cost of the project will only escalate with further delays. The FHWA construction index has been growing at a rate that is four times that of consumer prices. The value of right of way likewise has been increasing in a robust local land market.
- The community has been working with MDOT for over 15 years in a good faith effort to improve access from and to I-96 and M-59. Every request that MDOT has made of the community has been satisfied.
- The East Howell project pre-dates current Michigan Transportation Commission policy on the construction of new interchanges and a portion of the project has been completed. In other words, the project is vested and has current environmental clearances.

## Option 2—Build the Bridge Now

A second, viable option is to build the bridge over I-96 that will connect Latson and Nixon Roads. This will benefit the area in several ways:

- Although intended to improve mobility, limited access freeways often are barriers to safe communities. The current limited number of grade separations in the Brighton Howell area is of great concern to local officials. Police, fire, and emergency rescue services have documented the lost time problems with the existing layout that was planned in 1958. Since that time, tens of thousands of new residents are living in the expanded Brighton-Howell urban area.
- In a letter to Director Jeff, Howell Schools Superintendent Charles Breiner cited the importance of the interchange to the 167 square mile district. In fact, the proposed interchange is located in the geographic heart of the district. The safety and security of student transportation is greatly helped by a bridge over I-96, which reduces miles traveled by the busses and the time spent waiting at increasingly congested intersections at Chilson, Dorr, and Pinckney Roads. Further, a savings in route mileage immediately translates into more dollars spent in the classrooms.
- MDOT has completed a set of construction plans for this project at considerable expense. The bridge could be built as part of program of staged construction with ramps and capacity improvements scheduled to occur later. In the interim, the LCRC could work with MDOT to get Nixon Road “on-system” so that the local federal aid committee could schedule it for project delivery before the interchange ramps are constructed.

## Option 3—Acquire Right of Way & Perform Mitigation

A third option that has been discussed is the acquisition of needed right of way and the performance of environmental mitigation activities as outlined in the FEIS. There are advantages to this:

- Right of way is one of the most costly elements of the project. Acquiring right of way now before costs escalate further will make the construction of the project easier to program by eliminating these expenses now.
- MDOT already has some committed right of way purchases now for this project. Further, Genoa Township has carefully reviewed proposed site plans to keep private development outside of the interchange or capacity improvement “footprints.” This technique of right of way preservation will reduce the total cost of acquisition, as has been demonstrated in the pilot project done for M-59 in Livingston County.
- The development of a right of way acquisition and environmental mitigation strategies would strengthen the partnership with MDOT and local communities. This will facilitate the necessary relationships to build the project within an agreed-upon time frame.

**Latson Road Interchange**  
**Case for Support**  
Presented by the Latson Road Interchange Coalition  
November 2004

## **Livingston County Challenged with Growth**

Livingston County, which for some time has been known as the “fastest growing county in Michigan” finds itself both benefiting from, and struggling with, tremendous growth in population.

Between the 1990 and 2000 census, the county itself grew by 35.7%, from 115,000 residents to 154,000 residents. The Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) has estimated that this number grew to 180,000 residents in 2004. This trend is not predicted to lessen.

The county’s strategic location and population expansion has brought an increase in jobs in the manufacturing, service and retail segments. According to a 2004 report by University of Michigan economists, the county is expected to add nearly 2,000 jobs through 2005, including an expansion of 400 jobs in manufacturing.

With this growth, a huge increase in traffic congestion has already occurred and will continue, particularly in the east Howell area/central Livingston County area which is currently experiencing the brunt of burgeoning numbers of residents and businesses..

The Howell area—which encompasses the City of Howell, Genoa Township, Marion Township and Oceola Township—is now struggling with a staggering increase in traffic counts, particularly in the core areas of I-96, where commercial and most residential growth is clustered. There are an estimated 8,800 jobs in this corridor, 1,137 of them created since 1999.

*Since the year 2000, the townships of Genoa, Marion and Oceola have each gained over 1,000 new residents and Livingston County has added almost 20,000 new residents. --SEMCOG*

## **Howell Area’s Access to I-96 Is Obsolete**

Interchanges for Livingston County were planned and established in the 1950s when it was a small, rural county. At the east end of the Howell area, Exit 141, the so-called Lake Chemung interchange, was constructed to accommodate traffic exiting from westbound I-96 only. Vehicles entering I-96 at that interchange could only go on one way: east.

The Livingston County of 2004 is vastly different from that of 1950. The county population increased 500% from when the partial interchange was designed. As was stated earlier, it has increased over 13% just since the 2000 Census

The changes in the distribution of population and commercial activity to a new center in Genoa Township require that a full interchange at Latson Road and I-96 be constructed. Genoa Township has been a growth engine for Michigan's economy. Jobs there increased over 26% in the period between 1999 and 2002, when they were declining elsewhere in the region and state. Much of this job growth has taken place along Grand River, east of Howell.

The increased commercial and residential demands for access to I-96 as a valuable east/west highway created great pressure on adjacent interchanges and roads. Howell's historic downtown area became the route for trucks making deliveries to Genoa Township and employees trying to reach this new employment zone. Brighton's Exit 145 experiences huge, costly back-ups of vehicles during peak hours. Other area intersections have become clogged, safety has been compromised and unnecessary miles are traveled by those in both the private and the public sector.

While the county remained rural, a partial interchange at the east end of Howell was sufficient. This is no longer the case.

*"The Livingston County Data Book reports a 24 hour traffic count of 15,000-plus vehicles (2002 count) for the Spencer Road exit from I-96, and a 31,000 plus vehicles (2000 count) for the Grand River exit. Projecting that half of this count represents east bound traffic; we could effectively reduce our business district pass-through traffic by 50%, thus creating a more favorable shopping environment for our local business community."*

*--Pamela McConeghy, Greater Brighton Area Chamber of Commerce*

## Latson Road Interchange Helps MDOT

The Latson Road interchange is a unique opportunity to resolve growing pressure at adjacent interchanges 137 and 145. The MDOT and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) approved a traffic study for the Latson Road interchange project that documents the likely improved operation of these overloaded interchanges with the construction of a full interchange at Latson Road. With the construction of the new interchange, the state can delay the need to consider geometric and capacity improvements to those adjacent.

We believe that the continued growth in Livingston County will be a challenge for transportation agencies. This includes securing a more effective commercial linkage between I-96 and M-59 in one of Michigan's newest and most dynamic urban areas. This growth can be managed effectively with strategic improvement such as the Latson Road interchange. Delay of the project will just accelerate the deterioration of service levels at adjacent interchanges. This certainly will make their improvement more costly.

The recently completed improvements to the Lake Chemung off ramp enhanced the safe use of the existing interchange. The capacity of this revised interchange, however, is highly limited and will be exceeded by continuing growth in this portion of Livingston County. The FHWA said "...that the combined elements of the Latson/Nixon Road and Lake Chemung Alternatives [were selected] based upon the ability to meet the project purpose and need and from a detailed analysis of the social, economic, and environmental impacts."

## Latson Road Would Improve Public Safety and Make School Transportation Safer and Cheaper

Freeways, while enhancing elements of the transportation system, also present barriers to local travel and community access. The Latson Road interchange provides another bridge over I-96 at a significant point midway between Howell and Brighton. The existing north/south bridges over I-96 are no longer adequate to meet the residential and commercial growth pattern that already exists.

The Latson Road interchange will assist in developing a significant and necessary north-south transportation corridor in Livingston County to supplement existing through routes. The lack of an adequate number of crossings over I-96 has clogged area intersections, increased air pollution, and created unnecessary safety problems.

The improvements outlined in the Major Investment Study that MDOT requested for this project will create a continuous north-south route that is over 16 miles in length. This will permit more convenient, fuel-efficient routing of emergency service providers and local school pupil transportation. Ultimately this infrastructure improvement will result in better use of tax dollars and better service to customers.

*"This proposed interchange is located in the heart of the 167-square mile Howell Public Schools District, currently enrolling 8262 students... Over 60 busses per day travel over 5000 miles per day to pick up and deliver students. Over 55 percent of these roads are dirt. The increasing congestion along Grand River, the burgeoning number of retail establishments and their concomitant 8,800 jobs in the immediate vicinity of Latson, Grand River and I-96 create clear rationales for building the interchange now rather than later."*  
--Chuck Breiner, Superintendent, Howell Public Schools

*"There is a great deal of concern over this issue with fire and EMS in that maneuvering through this area going to emergencies is difficult at best. Freeway access for fire and EMS, especially westbound I-96 is a problem in itself. The Howell Area Fire Department's primary initial response comes from a station on Latson Rd. between Golf Club and M-59. EMS responds from their base which is located on the County Road Commission property just down from the proposed interchange. We, as responders to I-96 have to utilize the Chemung exit and if traffic is backed up, especially westbound, then our alternative is D-19 to the west. We currently have a fire station located nearby at Dorr Rd. and I-96, however there is obviously no access to the freeway. The proposed interchange would allow for considerable decreases in our response times from the two fire stations and the EMS base."*  
--Jim Reed, Chief, Howell Area Fire Department



## Latson Road Is the Environmentally-Friendly Solution to Freeway Access

The construction of a major transportation artery along the Latson Road corridor will help to reduce sprawl within the Brighton-Howell-South Lyon Urban Area. It will be an organizing framework for the managed growth of several communities—something all good land uses planning advocates. If a full four-way interchange at Latson Road is not achieved, economic development will seek other locations adjacent to more rural freeway interchanges.

The Latson Road interchange plan has been carefully evaluated to determine all of its environmental impacts including land use impacts. Genoa Township has implemented a land use strategy that will protect adjacent land resources. Most of the area affected by the proposed Latson Road interchange is included in the federally mandated South Lyon-Howell-Brighton Urban Area.

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) took specific note of Genoa Township's commitment to managed growth in the event that the interchange is built. The Record of Decision issued October 4, 2000 states: "Finally, Genoa Township's adopted Subarea Plan, part of their 1999 Master Plan, and their Wetland Protection Standards will minimize future indirect and/or secondary impacts to land use and the natural environment from the selected interchange alternative."

*"Great effort was made to involve all stakeholders, including residential property owners, environmentalists, and community leaders in the study process. It was their commitment to careful land use and utility planning that guided the study to its conclusions. It would be a cynical mockery of their efforts to fund improvements with money from Big Box developments."*  
--Mike Craine, Livingston County's Road Manager

## The People of Livingston County are Team Players

When MDOT told us that a new interchange of this type would require a Major Investment Study and that there was no funding for that type of study, we understood. We found the money so that the study could be completed without dislocating MDOT's commitments elsewhere.

We designed a study process that met the strict requirements of MDOT and the FHWA. And the study process was community based so that alternatives could be examined for their social and environmental impacts and would be acceptable locally in order that a project could proceed without controversy.

The Latson Road interchange project has broad public benefit and support. The evaluation of interchange alternatives was conducted using an award-winning community involvement process. Social, environmental, land use and community impacts were carefully analyzed and submitted for review through MDOT to the Federal Highway Administration. Area townships as well as the cities of Brighton and Howell have supported and endorsed the plan.

The local agencies have agreed to support the necessary improvements on the local road system that are needed if the interchange is built. Even now the townships and the Livingston County Road Commission are working to finance and construct the capacity improvement need on Latson Road between Grand River (BL-96) and state highway M-59.

MDOT will find Livingston County to be a proactive partner in this project. We look forward to the opportunity to sit down with MDOT officials to determine the local participation needed.

*"The construction of this interchange has clear, broad-based support in the county. That's because it is vital to so many groups: manufacturing, education, public safety, economic developers, downtowns, retailers and residents. The Latson Road Interchange Coalition, made up of representatives of all these groups, stands ready to work with MDOT to make this a reality."*

*--Tom Sullivan, President of Cleary University and  
Chair of the Latson Road Coalition*

## **Saving Cool Cities from Misdirected Traffic**

The cities of Brighton and Howell are proud of their dynamic downtowns and burgeoning opportunities to be recognized as part of Michigan's "cool cities" movement. These goals are challenged by deficiencies in the freeway network and its interchanges.

The existing urban areas of these two cities overlap north and south of I-96. Brighton is overwhelmed by through traffic accessing or leaving I-96 at both Spencer Road and at West Grand River. Levels of traffic service are dismal, resulting in air pollution, congestion, and a hostile pedestrian environment. The current Lake Chemung interchange does not provide access south of the freeway and so this pattern has continued, despite many efforts by the city to calm traffic and to improve access to I-96, such as with its innovative role in the reconfiguration of the eastbound on-ramp.

The Latson Road traffic studies document the concerns of the downtown community of Howell concerning the cars *and trucks* that drive through Howell in order to access the commercial and industrial development just east of downtown in Genoa Township. Owners of historic downtown properties report structural damage to these fine old buildings caused by the endless vibration of traffic.

The Latson Road interchange will reduce the number of commercial vehicles that have to use Grand River east of the City of Howell in order to access existing commercial and industrial development. This reduction of commercial traffic on Grand River will improve the capacity of existing interchanges, reduce air pollution, and enhance the pedestrian environment in Howell's central business district—listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

*"For many years, the historic buildings in Downtown Howell have been threatened by vibrations caused by semi-trucks traveling along Grand River Avenue. Building owners and downtown residents are experiencing cracked foundations and supporting walls, as well as major discomforts and damage to personal items, from the vibrations. Our downtown buildings were largely*

*constructed near the turn of the century and create a vibrant 'cool' atmosphere that is unique in Livingston County. We must do whatever we can to preserve these structures from damage due to truck traffic."*

*—Amy Connolly, City of Howell DDA*

## Let us show you the money...

All the engineering and environmental work has been completed on the Latson Road Interchange project. The project is ready to proceed.

But road projects like this are costly. Current MDOT estimates for this project total approximately \$36 million.

Of that total, approximately \$11 million is needed for right-of-way acquisition. As of March 2004, \$2.5 million "left over" from the Chemung exit reconfiguration is still earmarked for the project, along with an additional \$750,000 from the current fiscal year and an additional \$1 million. This could be used for right-of-way purchases. With the rapidly escalating price of land, this would be best spent now, rather than later. Genoa Township has done a great job preserving future right of way from the footprint of new development—it's only fair to start paying for it with money intended for that purpose.

U.S. Congressman Mike Rogers has been strong in his support of this project. He currently is requesting from his congressional colleagues the funds that MDOT needs to acquire the balance of the right of way.

This community is aware that a percentage of the project must come from local dollars, both public and private. The county is committed to provide \$2.5 million of the local road costs included in the over-all project budget. The Latson Road Interchange Coalition is eager to sit down with MDOT officials to determine exactly what other participation is needed on the local level.

*"The importance of the Latson Interchange can be summed up in just a few words: 'Jobs'-- After showing significant increases in job creation already, this area will, with the installation of the interchange, continue that positive trend and maintain those jobs already created. 'Preservation'-- Construction of this interchange will relieve the pressure on the interchanges in Brighton and Howell, thus extending their functionality and life and preserving the investment already made in them. 'Safety' -- a main north and south artery through the heart of Livingston County will assure the people dramatically improved access to emergency vehicles and services.*

*Genoa Township stands committed and prepared to continue our assistance with this worthwhile project and promote the health, safety and welfare of our residents, and the residents of our neighboring communities."*

*--Gary McCririe, Supervisor, Genoa Township*

## Not a Sprawl Issue

The Latson Road Interchange is not just another project that will encourage sprawl and unbridled growth. In fact, it will preserve the viability and walkability of two great downtowns and encourage any future growth in the appropriate area. The growth of manufacturing, retail and residential has already occurred in the corridor this interchange will serve. Now all parties, including MDOT, our school district, public safety experts and elected officials, must act to accommodate the transportation needs that regional economic trends have created. The functional obsolescence of the existing access to I-96 between Brighton and Howell is every bit as broken as the deteriorated pavement elsewhere in the state.

*"The growth in the Latson Road/I-96 area is here. 8,800 jobs exist in this corridor now, an increase of 15% between 1999 and 2002. It is an established center of manufacturing and regional retail. These businesses struggle to get their goods delivered to and from points west. All this traffic is forced to travel on Grand River Avenue, mostly traversing our historic downtown. This results in production and delivery delays, higher transportation costs and deterioration to the quality of life in our beautiful downtown."*  
--Pat Convery, Howell Area Chamber of Commerce

## Why now?

The history of the Latson Road Interchange began in 1992 and has continued slowly through Federal approval, engineering and environmental. It is now time to put this project on the schedule so at long last it can be a reality. Taxpayers have spent millions of dollars preparing planning studies, developing detailed construction plans and specifications, and acquiring right of way. People living in the "footprint" of the interchange have had to put their buy/sell, repaint/remodel decisions on hold while MDOT rearranges priorities. The plans and environmental clearances do not have an unlimited shelf life. The cost of right of way increases every year. Businesses have to consider their location options as access to markets to the west continues to be hampered by the partial interchange at Lake Chemung and congestion on BL-96. Further sprawl becomes the order of the day without a decision to build the Latson Road interchange. Let's not waste further time or money, let's build this interchange together now!